

Essays

Pivoting Between Identity Politics and Coalitional Relationships: Lesbian-Feminist Resistance to the Woman-Identified Woman

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This essay employs a coalitional perspective to revisit the Radicalesbians' 1970 manifesto, "The Woman Identified Woman," and to examine the circulation of its constitutive rhetoric of woman-identification within lesbian-feminist activist communities during the 1970s. I argue that lesbian-feminists utilized a pivoting strategy, a horizontal mode of working the space between identities, to leverage coalitional relationships and the woman identified woman as resources to craft alternative identity constructions that resisted woman-identification, challenged interlocking oppressions, and increased lesbian visibility within those respective communities. This analysis centralizes dynamic movement relationships and loyalties to approach the established narrative about lesbian-feminists in women's liberation from a new perspective and reexamine the constitutive rhetoric of woman-identification. Revisiting lesbian-feminist rhetoric brings the voices from an important archive to bear on feminist and queer history while centralizing coalitional relationships, offering a fruitful perspective from which to analyze social movement rhetoric and reexamine an important artifact in the feminist rhetorical canon.

Keywords coalition, gay liberation, identity politics, lesbian-feminism, pivoting, second-wave feminism, social movement, women's liberation

On May 1, 1970, at a plenary session at the Second Congress to Unite Women, an event sponsored by the National Organization for Women (NOW), the lights in the room suddenly went dark. When they came back on, a group of women wearing lavender t-shirts with prominent second-wave feminist Betty Friedan's words "Lavender Menace" emblazoned across the chest "liberated" the microphone on the stage to confront "anti-Lesbian attitudes" within the feminist movement (Abbott and Love 113; Cooper 3; Shumsky 17; Evans, *Tidal Wave* 51). In the audience, members of the New York Radicalesbians, a group that brought together women from the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and women's liberation groups, shared "personal experiences, debunked the stereotypes, and asked women to come forward

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to support the right of Lesbians to speak out” (Cooper 3). They also distributed a paper entitled “The Woman Identified Woman” (WIW) that articulated the central tenets of lesbian-feminist politics and identity, opened up the definition of “lesbian” to include heterosexual women, and suggested unification of heterosexual women and lesbian-feminists through woman-identification (Myron and Bunch 11; Poirot 263; Tate, “The Ideological Effects” 9).¹ For rhetorical scholars and many lesbian-feminists of the era, the WIW succinctly captured the politics and identity of “lesbian-feminism,” and the “woman-identified woman” soon became an “anchoring term” for White lesbian-feminists (Myron and Bunch 11; Poirot 263; Tate, “The Ideological Effects” 4). In the years after the Radicalesbians took the stage, lesbian-feminists continued to discuss and debate the notion of woman-identification as they circulated the WIW manifesto and considered its arguments and implications in the pages of their community periodicals. My analysis takes up a dimension of these debates to illuminate how, in circulation, the constitutive rhetoric of woman-identification offered inventional resources for identity extending beyond the scope of the WIW manifesto, particularly for those women who resisted the terms “woman-identified” and maintained coalitional relationships with other social movements. By accounting for such resistance to an “anchoring term” of identity, I reconsider constitutive rhetoric as a resource for multiple modes of identification (instead of a singular and authoritative statement that operates through interpellation) to examine the productive power of coalitional politics of relation.

This study revisits and reinterprets the subsequent centrality of the WIW statement to lesbian-feminist identity formation. Although the WIW was perhaps intended as a confrontational or consciousness-raising document for the initial audience of straight-identified feminist women gathered at the Second Congress to Unite Women, the rhetoric of woman-identification circulated widely through lesbian-feminist communities across the country. As a result, the WIW went far beyond its appeal for straight women or for activists seeking political unity (Abbott and Love 113; Jasinski and Merceica 315; Poirot 275). It politicized sexuality for those lesbians who identified with multiple movements for social change, from gay liberation to black liberation to antiwar activism, even as they struggled with homophobia and sexism within those activist communities. The WIW thus offered an important statement of lesbian-feminist identity in 1970, but just as some lesbian-feminists embraced the notion of being “woman-identified women,” others resisted.

The WIW and rhetoric of woman-identification circulated throughout lesbian-feminist communities in periodicals, at conferences, and in speeches. The archive at the heart of this study represents a broad swath of lesbian-feminist voices from across the United States, including San Francisco, New York, Houston, Seattle, Ann Arbor, and Atlanta.² As Jan Whitt notes, alternative publishing platforms flourished in feminist and lesbian-feminist communities around the country (165) and offered critical communication outlets for lesbians and lesbian-feminists in communities across the United States. For this essay, I primarily draw upon articles, editorials, speeches, and forums published between 1970 and 1979 in periodicals including *Atalanta* (Atlanta, GA), *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (Boston), *The Furies* (Washington, DC), *Lavender Woman* (Chicago), *The Lesbian Tide* (Los Angeles), *Leaping Lesbian* (Ann Arbor), *The Lesbian Feminist* (New York), *Out and About* (Seattle), *The Pointblank Times* (Houston, TX), and *Sisters* (San Francisco).

The provenance of several publications points to how lesbian-feminists were frequently positioned at the nexus of two social movements: gay rights and women's liberation, despite their presence in multiple other movements at the time. Several of these publications started as newsletters for local chapters of the national lesbian rights organization Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), associated with the gay rights movement. For example, *Focus* began as the *Boston DOB Newsletter*. The newsletter staff changed the name in 1971 to something they deemed "more appropriate" because they "reach[ed] more than just the Boston DOB membership" and drew more material "examining gay women and their relationship with the women's liberation movement" ("Notice Our New Look!"). Similarly, in August 1971, editor Jeanne Cordova and DOB member Barbara McLean helped to "graduate" the *Los Angeles DOB Newsletter* from a local newsletter to a "lesbian feminist magazine" called *Lesbian Tide* (Gallo 180). Historian Marcia Gallo notes that *Lesbian Tide* remained directly tied to DOB until 1973, when it began to publish independently. *Sisters* started in November 1970 as a local supplement to the nationally distributed DOB magazine, *The Ladder*. In the opening editorial statement, the *Sisters* editorial staff framed it as an "exclusively lesbian magazine, devoted to Lesbian liberation" and specifically serving those needs of lesbians not met by "gay women's papers . . . in the 'radical' vein" (Sisters Staff). Other publications emerged with the express purpose of explicating, living, and communicating radical feminist or separatist ideological perspectives. *The Furies*, for example, was a short-lived periodical published by the radical lesbian-feminist Furies Collective in Washington, DC, from January 1972 to 1973. In short, the origins of such outlets necessarily expand the ideological, political, and relational contexts in which lesbian and lesbian-feminist identity discourse was circulated.³

I suggest here that an emphasis on radical feminism and the WIW statement as a primary mode of identification for lesbian-feminists need not overdetermine critical analysis of lesbian-feminism in the 1970s. Even though many lesbian-feminists centralized their identification with feminism, they did so from several *concurrent* and *shifting* vantage points and ideological perspectives. Some who resisted woman-identification reframed their relationship with the women's movement because several of its members worried about the presence and visibility of lesbians (for reasons of political expediency and public and interpersonal relations, undergirded by explicit or tacit homophobia). Others resisted the WIW's particular terms of identity, but still aimed the rhetoric of WIW outward to raise feminist consciousness within other movement communities—including black liberation and antiwar movements. A third set of lesbians resisted the WIW by explicitly embracing the erstwhile stigmatized, transgressive, and politically dangerous term "lesbian." Such examples of resistance highlight how the WIW provided inventional resources for lesbian-feminists to articulate identities beyond the boundaries of radical feminism.

This analysis centralizes varying and dynamic movement relationships and loyalties to approach the established narrative about lesbian-feminists in women's liberation, the prominent constitutive identity rhetoric of woman-identification, and the WIW manifesto from a new perspective. My approach first acknowledges the powerful role radical feminism played (and continues to play) in lesbian-feminist identity construction. Indeed, there is no doubt that radical feminist ideology integrally shaped the history of lesbian-feminism in the United States, as demonstrated by the erudite analyses of feminist rhetorical scholars Helen Tate ("The Ideological Effects") and Kristan Poirot and feminist historians Alice Echols and Nancy

Whittier. My analysis aims to further complicate that relationship without severing the historical, ideological, and activist ties to radical feminism. I argue that the circulating discourse among women who self-identified as lesbian-feminists challenged heteropatriarchal oppression from alternative ideological perspectives beyond (and including) radical feminism. These women leveraged such challenges from intersectional perspectives that captured the intertwined and complex experiences of identity and coalition. These perspectives begin to flesh out the picture of what lesbian-feminism meant to a range of women during the 1970s.

Examining constitutive rhetorics as generative lacunae for multiple modes of identification (rather than singular articulations of identity) opens space for considering coalition politics, specifically coalitional relationships and their impact on identity. Drawing upon the notion of belonging and Aimee Carrillo Rowe's "coalitional subjectivity" (3), this essay explores identity crafted in the interstices between women's liberation, gay liberation, and ethnic/racial liberation movements. These concepts provide an alternative vantage point from which to analyze the WIW and the rhetoric of woman-identification. Together, they offer a lens to begin to answer the question at the heart of this study: How did lesbian-feminists build a sense of shared identity relative to the term "woman-identification" while navigating relationships with gay liberation, ethnic/racial liberation movements, and/or women's liberation? This question guides my theoretical efforts to unpack and to challenge the supposed dichotomous dynamic between coalition politics and identity politics. I do so by suggesting that lesbian-feminists managed that dynamic by utilizing a *pivoting* strategy to draw from coalitional relationships and the WIW as resources to craft alternative identity constructions that resisted woman-identification, challenged interlocking oppressions, and increased lesbian visibility within those respective communities.

In other words, I suggest that the concept of the pivot in conjunction with coalitional relationships opens an avenue to (re)considering a more expansive set of possibilities for lesbian-feminism as a contingent identity category. I also suggest that to begin to view women's liberation as one of *several* identification resources in the 1970s creates the space to recognize liberal lesbian-feminists, lesbian-feminists wary of straight feminists coopting lesbianism, gay women's liberation activists, and lesbian-feminists of color. Such multiplicity illuminates the interconnectedness of social movement activists at the time and reveals the robust quality of lesbian-feminist activist discourse during the 1970s. Moreover, it engages and extends extant feminist scholarship that centralizes women's liberation and radical feminism within lesbian-feminism and/or negatively evaluates the competing identity discourses among lesbian-feminists throughout the 1970s.⁴

This essay proceeds by first considering the scholarship concerned with social movement rhetoric, constitutive rhetoric, identity politics, and coalition politics and then introducing the concept of pivoting. Next, I contextualize the experiences of lesbian-feminists within second-wave feminist and gay liberation activism in the United States in the 1970s. I then revisit "The Woman Identified Woman," to interpret its power as an affirmative articulation of lesbian-feminist identity that responded to the conflicts and tensions between liberal and radical feminists and addressed the challenges facing lesbians in the gay rights movement. In the section that follows, I analyze the lesbian-feminist identity rhetorics that resisted woman-identification and reconfigured lesbian-feminists' relationship with women's liberation by featuring coalitional relationships and dual/multiple identification.

Finally, I suggest that considering identity rhetorics in conjunction with coalitional relationships through the concept of the pivot productively expands our understanding of constitutive rhetoric in social movements and challenges the dichotomy often drawn between identity politics and coalition politics. Ultimately, this analysis reveals a rich, polyvocal narrative of lesbian-feminism in the United States during the 1970s and affords a new perspective for reexamining the WIW, an important document in the feminist rhetorical canon.

Constitutive Rhetoric, Identity Politics, Coalitional Relationships, and Pivoting

Rhetorical scholars have long analyzed the powerful role rhetoric serves for those fighting for justice and social change. One line of inquiry explores how identities are constituted and identity discourses are circulated and contested within cultures and social movements (Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Shultz; Charland; Gregg; Tate "The Ideological Effects"; Lake; McGee). As Michael McGee argues, collective identities are rhetorical constructs that result from the pulling together of ideological commitments "into incipient political myths" (240, 243). These collective identities "structure and give meaning to personal experience" (Duggan 793). As Richard Gregg points out in his explication of rhetoric's "ego-function," members of social movements often direct messages inward to facilitate identification and a cohesive group identity to effect social change (71). Shared identification and collective identity translated into political action signals the move at the heart of identity politics. As internal messages or rhetorical constructs of identity circulate among communities, they can gather strength and create internal debate. Part of the challenge, Benita Roth argues, is that identity is often upheld as "authentic" by an ethic of "organizing one's own," which fosters a dichotomy between organizing on behalf of an identity and building coalitions with others (106).

Identity politics are challenged on many fronts, but they continue to hold sway in social movements. Some detractors dismiss identity politics as a limited and divisive approach that weakens movements from within and proves detrimental to the common good (Alcoff and Mohanty 3; Gitlin 35). A common challenge from feminist, queer, and cultural theorists charges that identity politics rest upon the notion of a coherent or unified identity, which has been debunked as a modernist assumption (Alcoff 264; Hall 2). These arguments are well taken, but my analysis suggests that analyzing identity politics, specifically the circulation of and resistance to identity rhetorics, is still useful and may offer a more complex story. Lisa Duggan notes that identities are "never static, monolithic, or politically innocent" and can therefore become "contested sources of authority and legitimation" (793). Because constitutive identity rhetorics can be contested, they can be evaluated for their efficacy and deemed successes or failures (Tate, "The Ideological Effects"). More than success or failure, constitutive discourse creates the "conditions of possibility" for identity (Jasinski 75).

As a result, the space for resistance to identity rhetoric by members *within* a group provides an important source of invention. For instance, when a group or community "declares" their collective identity, as in Maurice Charland's *Peuple Quebecois*, such declaration does not preclude contestation among those in the group. There might be members who are interpellated by the document or discourse, but they still have the agency to resist and invent other possibilities. In Charland's

analysis of the sovereignty debate in Quebec, he argues “not only is the character or identity of the ‘people’ open to rhetorical revision, but the very boundary of whom the term ‘people’ includes and excludes is rhetorically constructed: As the ‘pueple’ is variously characterized, the persons who make up the ‘people’ can change” (136). Within one rhetorically constructed community, multiple definitions of identity can vie for legitimacy. Arlene Stein interprets the presence of such multiple competing identity definitions or discourses as an obstacle to the overall success of a social movement or even as an indication of failure (136). Yet Duggan and others provide for the possibility of constituting identities in resistance to prominent, recognized, or established constructs. As group members contest a prominent identity discourse, new sources of identification fuel the formulation of alternatives. For Charland, contestation and invention “reveals the degree to which peoples are constituted in discourse” (136). In addition to considering matters of degree, however, scholars should explore the specific sources political actors use to invent alternatives for identity. In analyzing these circulating rhetorics, scholars can continue to approach identity as an ongoing, unfinished, and rhetorical process and examine how “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (Hall 4). Consequently, such an approach provides a means to break down the dichotomy between identity and coalition by viewing coalitional relationships as important sources for invention and identification.

Though coalition is commonly defined in pragmatic, instrumental, and temporal ways, especially in political contexts (Albrecht and Brewer 4; “Coalition”), some scholars shift the focus from organizational to relational terms to demonstrate how coalition impacts identity. Moving away from definitions that emphasize the joint work of distinct organizations or groups in pursuit of a common goal, sociologists Jill Bystydzienski and Steven Schacht define coalitions as “fluid sites of collective behavior” that blend “multiple personal identities with political activism” to “influence the development of commitments, strategies, and specific actions” (2). Bystydzienski and Schacht’s definition begins to tap into the relationship between identity and coalitional politics, but Aimee Carrillo Rowe’s concept of coalitional subjectivity (10) expands identity formation from the individual to the relational through what she calls a “politics of relation” and “belonging” (3). This shift to a relational understanding of coalition politics defies the limits of organizational affiliations, formal coalitional partnerships, or temporal political efforts. In doing so, it recognizes the affective and discursive modes through which relationships are defined, enacted, and experienced.

A relational perspective values less formalized yet powerful and shifting affective identifications that animate both coalitions and identities. As Carrillo Rowe explains, “belonging is political” and “the meaning of self . . . is forged across a shifting set of relations that we move in and out of, often without reflection” (3). She explains that in contrast to conceptualizing identity as a “claim to being,” alliances—or coalitional relationships, as I emphasize here—are conceptualized around a “we” that “makes claims to belonging” (9). Within this relational context, the identity of the subject, the “I,” is “multiple, shifting, and contingent upon the relational sites in which she inserts herself” (9). Placing identity formation and coalition politics into a relational framework, then, allows not only for fluidity of coalitional relationships among movements and movement activists but also concurrent, overlapping, and even conflicting identity rhetorics. In short, utilizing those “shifting relations” as a basis for understanding competing and concurrent conceptions of

identity opens a space to investigate further how coalitions interact with identity formation and contestation.

Rhetorical discourse can capture the dynamism of coalitional relationships, movement/organizational loyalties, and identity possibilities for social movement activists. Scholars such as Karma Chavez (2013), Cricket Keating (2005), and Bernice Reagon (1998) see the language of coalition as central to discourses of social change activism. Analyzing how activists talked about or referenced coalitional relationships is critical to understanding how coalition politics impacted the identity formation process over time within the context of overlapping movements. In other words, noting the explicit or implicit references to dynamic relations among, across, and within communities—regardless of whether formalized organizational entities or activist efforts occurred—can illuminate identity discourses in new ways. Scholars can examine what Chela Sandoval theorizes as “coalitional consciousness,” or a form of “coalition identity politics” (71) in action. Further, considering coalitional relationships can provide a mode of accounting for activists who navigate intersectional identities and oppression within those relationships. One mode for such negotiation involves a strategy that I call pivoting.

In what follows, I use the concept of the pivot to indicate the process of making one’s identity more salient from context to context. Instead of a vertical or hierarchical move associated with privileging one identity *over* another, pivoting references a horizontal move, akin to shifting one’s weight in basketball. Pivoting becomes a way to rhetorically work the space between identity locations, emphasizing one identity for one audience and another for audiences of differing subject positions. As a rhetorical move, pivoting is strategic and can be employed for specific purposes that are politically or ideologically motivated. The pivot is associated with identification, although it emphasizes the possible (simultaneous and multiple) modes of identification between, among, and within audiences and communities—particularly those that are not completely aligned by a shared identification. As a way of navigating the tension between coalition and identity politics, pivoting animates a recalibration process whereby identity is readjusted through the pivot in accordance with the context and relationship with a coalitional partner.⁵

In short, pivoting provides an intersectional strategy or a way to consider coalitional relationships at once as a generative and dynamic source of identification(s) and opportunities to acknowledge complexity. For this analysis and as a concept, pivoting captures the dynamic rhetorical agility many lesbian-feminists needed to manage their relationships with women’s liberation, gay liberation, black freedom, or ethnic liberation movements (and others) simultaneously, while attempting to express what those movements meant for their identities as lesbian-feminists. Indeed, many lesbian-feminists express anger about racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia they experienced within lesbian, feminist, gay liberation, and black freedom movement communities. But despite such anger, many continued to utilize those activist relationships as resources for resisting identity rhetorics and crafting alternatives. In order to understand such resistance, the next section provides context and outlines the central tensions facing lesbian-feminists during the 1970s.

Lesbian-Feminists, Women’s Liberation, and Gay Liberation

By 1970, many who identified as gay women and/or lesbian-feminists were involved with activism in several social movements of the era, yet they frequently found

themselves at the heart or on the margins of two related but separate social movements: women's liberation and gay liberation. Both movements had picked up steam throughout the 1960s, launching into the 1970s with a surge of energy and new membership yet plagued by internal battles. These battles proved challenging for many activists. At this time, lesbian identity took center stage within women's liberation in two contradictory ways: as a dangerous threat and as a vanguard for the movement.⁶ Despite the unifying gestures "sisterhood" offered as a constitutive rhetoric of *feminist* identity during this time, its limitations concerning sexual identity were soon laid bare.⁷

The story of the homophobic treatment lesbians endured within feminist activist circles during this era is a well-worn tale. Lesbians had long participated in the women's movement (often silent about their sexuality) and served in leadership roles, yet if they opened up about their sexuality they were ignored or viewed as a threat. Feminist historians and rhetorical scholars have discussed the silencing and "purging" of lesbians active in NOW, especially in the organization's New York chapter, as well as Betty Friedan's homophobic comments that labeled lesbians a "lavender menace," threatening the public face of the feminist movement (Abbott and Love 122–125; Echols 215, 345, note 44; Tate, "The Ideological Effects" 3; Evans, *Tidal Wave* 51–53; Poirot 270). By 1970, NOW had created a toxic environment for lesbians (and for women *suspected* of being lesbian or bisexual), particularly among feminist activists advocating a liberal/reform agenda (Abbott and Love 123; Tate, "The Ideological Effects" 3–4; Poirot 275). Within such liberal feminist circles, lesbianism was often considered a "bedroom issue," allowing lesbian membership "on the grounds that all women were accepted and that what one does in bed is their own business" (Abbott and Love 109). Relegating lesbianism to private sexual behavior rather than acknowledging it as legitimate concern for feminist political action crafted a ready-made closet for many lesbian-feminists, whether they were open about their sexuality or not.⁸ In short, the "lesbian issue" continued to drive a wedge between feminists.⁹

Yet, because lesbians were already involved in feminist activism, there was growing need to develop a way to include them within the available feminist political identity. In contrast to liberal feminist kid-glove responses to lesbians, the emergent radical feminism located lesbians at the heart of its ideologies of liberation and revolution.¹⁰ Indeed, radical feminism posited lesbians as the quintessential feminists, the vanguard of radical politics. Having built a membership from former New Left movement activists, radical feminists argued that the political and societal structure itself was insufficient and liberation should be the goal of feminism (Wandersee xiv). For many, lesbianism represented the ultimate liberation: a life separated from patriarchy. The emergence of radical feminism and its embrace of lesbian identity lent itself to the constitution of a radical feminist identity for lesbians (Tate, "The Ideological Effects"). Yet by this time many lesbians had developed a sense of identity in connection to another activist community: the homophile and gay liberation movement. Many lesbians and lesbian-feminists faced with negotiating their identities as lesbians alongside their commitments to different feminist ideological camps also had to navigate the complicated gendered politics within the radicalizing gay rights movement.

By 1970, the gay liberation movement, building upon the long-established homophile movement, offered ways for gay men and lesbians to articulate their identities publicly by "coming out" to themselves and others, engaging in direct action,

and contributing to gay and lesbian publications (Darsey 47). Facing entrapment practices, police raids, and persistent discrimination, homophile activists and organizations in the 1950s and 1960s—including the Mattachine Society and ONE—drove the initial efforts against sodomy laws, police raids, and the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder (American Psychiatric Association; D'Emilio 14–17). Men and women of the homophile movement had taken to the streets, “zapped” (created media events of) national conferences of the APA, and marched outside the White House and Independence Hall in Philadelphia for government employment and citizenship rights (“APA Zap” 2–3; Kameny 191–194; Reminder Day flyer; “The Second Largest Minority”). Discrimination and oppression continued, however, despite a series of clashes with police in the 1960s—including the June 1969 rebellion by queer people at the Stonewall Inn in New York City's Greenwich Village that many historians and scholars paint as the watershed moment that violently ushered in the gay liberation movement (Boyd; Faderman and Timmons; Stryker).

Like the women's movement, the gay movement was hardly monolithic. By the 1970s, generational and ideological tensions had developed between two broad factions in the gay movement. The first faction, sometimes called “old gay” by younger activists, generally represented a commitment to a “liberal” approach grounded in earlier homophile activism (Deevey 25). The second, “new gay” faction represented the more recent, radicalized politics of the youthful gay liberation movement that emerged in the wake of the resistance of the late 1960s. These tensions within the gay movement compounded the challenges for lesbians and lesbian-feminists who supported a liberal political approach, as well as for those who identified more strongly with the gay movement (e.g., those affiliated with DOB and other homophile groups).¹¹ Generational and ideological differences were only the beginning; sexism remained a long-standing problem in the homophile and gay liberation movements.

Though the homophile and gay liberation movement offered lesbians a significant source for their activist identities, they often faced exclusionary sexist treatment (D'Emilio; Martin, “If That's All”; Jay 82). Early on, partners and activists Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon attempted to remedy the exclusion they experienced as a *de facto* ladies “auxiliary” of Mattachine Society's San Francisco chapter. In 1955, they helped to establish the DOB, the first lesbian rights organization and lesbian-only space for political activism and socializing (D'Emilio 102; Gallo 3–5). DOB worked with Mattachine and other organizations for years on many of the aforementioned activist efforts, but by 1970, Martin publicly expressed frustration at the fact that lesbians often performed gendered labor within co-gender organizations (e.g., administrative duties, making and serving coffee) and remained virtually “invisible” to many gay men beyond organizational meetings. Such gendered divisions of labor and other examples of sexism did not disappear as the movement turned toward radical militancy and liberation following Stonewall. When activist Jean O'Leary brought lesbian-specific issues (e.g., child custody struggles and lesbian visibility within the gay movement) to the attention of male members of the Gay Activist Alliance in New York City, they dismissed her concerns as “trivial grievances” (Jay 82). Despite the resources for identification and validation of their identities as lesbians within the homophile and gay liberation movement, sexism created a significant wedge between lesbians and gay men. Martin, appropriating the phrase of the homophile movement to highlight lesbians' negative treatment, quipped, “Gay is good,” but not “good enough” for lesbians (Martin, “Del Martin

Blasts Men” 9).¹² Moreover, these challenges were only amplified for lesbian-feminists of color who confronted racism in both movements. For example, in 1976, founding members of the third-world gay women’s organization Salsa Soul Sisters wrote in *The Lesbian Feminist*,

Existing gay organizations have neither welcomed our participation nor championed our concerns. . . . We organized around the commonality of our problems as Black and Hispanic women. . . . We share in the strengthening and productivity of the whole gay community. (“Third World”)¹³

While lesbian-feminists experienced a certain hypervisibility within women’s liberation, albeit as a threat or a vanguard, they faced invisibility and even hostile treatment within gay movement activist communities.

It was within these dual contexts that lesbian-feminism—affirmed by radical feminism, dismissed by liberal feminism, and marginalized by gay movement politics—would crystallize into a new rhetorical construction that would catalyze a decade of identity contestation. The following section considers feminist rhetorical scholarship on this crucial and productive new source of lesbian-feminist identity formation in the 1970s: the woman-identified woman.

Rereading “The Woman Identified Woman”

Feminist rhetorical scholars have pointed to the Radicalesbian text “The Woman Identified Woman” and its concept of woman-identification as primary constitutive rhetorics of radical lesbian/feminist identity. Helen Tate identifies the WIW as an important rhetorical text that could have unified the women’s liberation movement and healed division (“The Ideological Effects” 9). She argues the WIW allowed white lesbian-feminists to successfully constitute a liberatory identity, but it ultimately failed to extend that identity to heterosexual feminists and women of color and was eventually co-opted by anti-feminists as a mode of attack (“The Ideological Effects” 20–24). Kristan Poirot extends her analysis to consider the limitations of the WIW and woman identification for liberal and radical feminists. Poirot argues that for both liberal and radical feminist communities, woman-identification rhetoric contained key possibilities for identity and liberation (265). Liberal feminists used woman-identification to contain the “lesbian threat” to the movement’s public image, while radical/lesbian feminists utilized woman-identification to bolster the boundaries of liberation within the available horizon of lesbian practices and the home, which was redeployed through the practice of separatism (Poirot 285). Poirot’s analysis rightly recognizes that liberal *and* radical/separatist feminists used woman-identification and that when radical/lesbian feminists articulated a “pre-determined ‘liberatory’ locale” (285) associated with woman-identification, they disciplined other women in the feminist movement, particularly straight feminists. Her analysis builds on Tate’s assessment of the WIW’s constitutive failure for heterosexual women to examine both ideological feminist camps, particularly with regard to radical/separatist feminists.¹⁴ Further analysis is required to explore the pushback by lesbian-feminists to woman-identification within the context of coalition politics.

Expanding on Tate and Poirot, I consider the role of the WIW and woman-identification for lesbian-feminists who fought for (and resisted) legitimacy within

women's liberation and gay liberation movements in the 1970s. I argue that analyzing the discourses about lesbian-feminism circulating at this time illuminates the ways in which previous accounts of this history have been overdetermined by an emphasis on radical/separatist feminism. I then explore how the WIW and woman-identification offered opportunities for lesbian-feminists to craft alternative modes of identification. Paying attention to several possibilities sharpens focus on the rhetorical constitution of multiple concurrent articulations of lesbian-feminism, defining various combinations of political, ideological, and sexual commitments in conjunction with feminist and gay liberation activism. Briefly revisiting the WIW text with an eye to its dual connections to women's liberation and gay liberation movements engages the text and the rhetoric of woman-identification as crafted within that interstitial nexus.

Throughout the WIW statement itself, the authors offered several definitions of "lesbian," beginning with the oft-quoted opening line, "A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion" (Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman" 81). This first line and the following paragraph made the case that, by way of her socialization, frustration, and politicization, the lesbian—now the woman-identified woman—represented "all women." The first section rhetorically united lesbian and heterosexual feminists through woman-identification based in the common experience of gender socialization. Yet, the unmarked qualities of the WIW's description of that socialization reinforced a narrative of normative middle-class white femininity to position the lesbian as the quintessential feminist. In the WIW statement, the Radicalesbians used the banner of woman-identification to link feminists together and air lesbian grievances regarding marginalization at the hands of society and also the women's movement. They explained:

Women in the movement have in most cases gone to great lengths to avoid discussion and confrontation with the issue of lesbianism. . . . They are hostile, evasive, or try to incorporate it into some "broader issue" . . . [or] they try to dismiss it as a "lavender herring." But it is no side issue. It is absolutely essential to the success and fulfillment of the women's liberation movement that this issue be dealt with. ("The Woman Identified Woman" 82)

The Radicalesbians' WIW manifesto clearly identified the shared stakes in the fight against heterosexual ideology and patriarchy to unite lesbians and straight feminists. They wrote, "As long as the label 'dyke' can be used to frighten women into a less militant stand, keep her separate from her sisters, keep her from giving primacy to anything other than men and family . . . she is controlled by the male culture" (81). First, this statement affirmed the experience of inter-movement oppression and denounced the homophobia within the movement. Second, it revealed the detrimental power lesbian-baiting had on movement health. The word "dyke" worked not only to silence lesbian sisters, but it kept other feminists (i.e., straight, black, Chicana) from adopting a radical ideological position. In this way, the Radicalesbians articulated common ground for building feminist identity against the ideology that supported the sex roles that kept women oppressed while decrying fellow feminists for using patriarchal lesbian-baiting strategies to oppress lesbians in the movement.

Not only did the WIW reorient the ideological problem that drove feminist activism to unite straight- and lesbian-feminists, its articulation of lesbianism also

debunked the prevalent authoritative definitions of homosexuality as diseased or deviant (American Psychiatric Association; Faderman 48). The Radicalesbians argued, for example, “lesbianism, like male homosexuality, is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy” (81). By refuting authoritative definitions of homosexuality, they anticipated feminist counterarguments used to discount lesbians and revealed their group’s position at the nexus of women’s liberation and gay liberation. The authors explained,

Homosexuality is a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behavior) on the basis of sex; as such it is an inauthentic . . . category. In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear. (Radicalesbians “The Woman Identified Woman” 81)

The Radicalesbians articulated a new order for gender and sexuality and imagined the possibility of the revolution’s success—a queer world in the making (Berlant and Warner 558). In that world, they argued, the very terms used to oppress women—particularly liberated women, like the words “lesbian” and “dyke”—would disappear as the power structure was eliminated.

By solidifying the WIW as both an invective and an olive branch to straight feminists that focused on how heterosexual ideology negatively affected *all* feminists, the Radicalesbians limited the horizon of woman-identification as a constitutive rhetoric for lesbian-feminist identity. As demonstrated above, the Radicalesbians emphasized the consequences of even being called a lesbian (or, of course, living openly as one) within homophobic culture. In an attempt to soothe the painful wounds of lesbian-baiting and claims that lesbianism was an inauthentic identity, the statement offered the woman-identified woman as a path to a sense of political unity for all feminists, gay or straight (Bottini; Koedt 79–81).¹⁵ Though this shift in terminology contained the promise of a queer world by offering the woman-identified woman as an alternative to lesbian or dyke, the Radicalesbians simultaneously diminished identity terms that held enormous significance for some lesbian-feminists. In response, lesbian-feminists resisted woman-identification in ways that took back abandoned terms of identification while adding a coalitional dimension to WIW’s powerful constitutive rhetoric. Indeed, some lesbians decided to view women’s liberation as a *coalitional* and *relational* resource instead of a singular source of identity. Reframing women’s liberation in this way allowed some lesbian-feminists to reassess their identity process without necessarily fully embracing a radical and/or separatist ethic, creating space for an intersectional articulation of identity. In short, this perspective held that working *with* straight feminists was fine, but crafting a lesbian-feminist identity on their terms was untenable.

Resisting Woman-Identification, Reframing Women’s Liberation

Radical and liberal lesbian-feminists rhetorically articulated lesbian-feminism as intimately connected to women’s liberation activism through the woman-identified woman. Indeed, the WIW linked lesbian and feminism to create a radical political identity presumably available to lesbian-feminists (Tate, *Toward a Rhetorical History*

142), yet it was a contested constitutive rhetoric *among* lesbian-feminists. Those who contested the WIW crafted lesbian-feminism in ways that revealed a range of identity discourses further shaped by the dual pressures of identity politics and coalitional relationships. These identity rhetorics responded to the limitations woman-identification presented for lesbians across the ideological spectrum and re-envisioned the relationship with women's liberation in coalitional terms in order to expand consciousness raising efforts and open avenues for co-gender activism.

One danger of conflating lesbianism with woman-identification was the fact that not all woman-identified women identified as lesbians. In response, some lesbian-feminists distanced themselves from the concept of woman-identification by highlighting an alternative source for identification: lesbian identity. Because woman-identification was tied to women's liberation and straight-identified women, such presumed loyalty to all "women" implicated lesbian-feminists within a "sisterhood" fraught with homophobia and invisibility. Megan Adams captured such discord for some lesbian-feminists in the Ann Arbor-based publication *Leaping Lesbian*:

I know you've heard the slogans: woman-identified woman, women who love women, etc., as if we have pledged undying allegiance and love for all women. It is implied that lesbians plead the cause of women as a sex. I am suspicious of these sentiments. It is uncomfortable to love all women when the vast majority of them prefer men; worse, it is a setup for rejection . . . (3)

For Adams, the constitutive rhetoric of woman-identification spelled a future of exactly the opposite—male-identification—that would perpetuate a gender hierarchy she had rejected as a lesbian. The "setup for rejection" could promote lesbian oppression and invisibility under the safer linguistic auspices of the "woman-identified woman." Writing in the *Lavender Woman* in 1972, Chicago activist Betty Peters likewise highlighted lesbian-feminists' precarious position in this way: "It's time we stop kidding ourselves. The straight world will not support us, they mean to kill us; straight women will not support us, they mean to ignore us; gay men will not support us, they mean to imitate us. . . . *We are none other than Lesbian-identified Lesbians*, and anything else is mockery and insanity" (3, emphasis added). Peters' response also pinpointed the challenges facing lesbians who sought inclusion or validation in both feminist and gay liberation activist communities. Such strong reactions from lesbian-feminists to the constitutive rhetorics coming out of women's liberation, including the WIW, pointed to the limited range of woman identification *for lesbian-feminists*. Peters' affirmation of "Lesbian-identified Lesbians" epitomized the shared frustration concerning WIW, especially as it could be used to further dismiss or ignore lesbians through the shift away from "lesbian." By highlighting lesbian identity, she and Adams also gestured toward the potential comfort of identifying with other lesbians and affirming their shared difference together.

Because lesbians experienced exclusion and invisibility within women's liberation and identity rhetoric like woman-identification functioned to replace the stigmatized term "lesbian," the space for lesbian and lesbian-feminist identity threatened to shrink or force them out altogether. Some tried to present linguistically similar alternatives like Peters' "Lesbian-identified Lesbian," while others advocated clear recognition of other loyalties and identity resources to support their argument for a lesbian-only space or a stronger affiliation with gay activism. Writing in *Focus*,

a Boston lesbian periodical linked to earlier homophile activism, Sharon Earll argued that women's liberation was simply not necessary for creating a lesbian-feminist identity. She stated, "Women's liberation, with its energies dedicated to children's day care centers [and] abortion laws . . . could give a damn about the gay community's battles for sex-law repeals, income tax reform, and the dual employment discrimination of female homosexuals" (4). In the title of her article, "United We Fall, Divided We Stand," Earll reversed the popular phrase of unity to call lesbian-feminists to take a stand on their own outside of women's liberation. Though steeped in a tone of frustration, her perspective reveals a sense of empowerment derived from aligning with gay liberation instead of women's liberation to take on issues facing gay women. In part, her use of the terms "female homosexuals" points to this preferred alliance. As Earll and others called the established and assumed relationship with women's liberation into question, still other lesbian-feminists continued working within feminist circles despite the aforementioned struggles. Their solution shifted the relationship with women's liberation in order to capitalize on it as a coalitional resource rather than a source for identity.

Freeing lesbian-feminist identity from the political and ideological confines of women's liberation opened up new possibilities for consciousness raising across social movements and coalitional co-gendered activism. Some lesbian-feminists used woman-identification to raise the consciousness of other lesbians and make the feminist movement relevant to them. For example, in 1971, Sharon R. called upon the Chicago lesbian community to consider the value of the woman-identified woman as a feminist consciousness-raising tool:

[T]he concept of the woman-identified woman is significant to Chicago Lesbians in other ways. For the most part, we have not dealt with women's liberation; apparently we feel that because we relate emotionally and sexually only to women, we don't need women's liberation. We seem to think that the movement is a result of the problems straight women encounter in relationships with their men, and we're immune since we don't deal with men. (5)

Sharon extended "men" to refer to patriarchal domination of society, arguing that the negative culture adversely affects all women, gay or straight. In doing so, she highlighted the value of the WIW—it held utility for lesbians who wanted to work in coalition with straight feminists in a battle against patriarchal structures that directly impacted them. Thus, while some viewed the WIW statement as a radical declaration of a specific identity and movement affiliation, other audiences may have dismissed the statement as an attempt to bring straight feminists on board with lesbian-feminist ideology. For Sharon R., the WIW could help cultivate the coalitional relationship among lesbians and straight feminists.

In a similar vein, Diane Benison, member of the Boston chapter of DOB and writing in *Focus* in 1971, differentiated between working with women's liberation and integrating it into her sense of lesbian identity. She explained, "Maybe I've gone through my own evolution, but I no longer see gay liberation and female liberation as two distinct and unrelated movements" ("Editorial" 4). For Benison, the gay women/lesbians of DOB had not recognized their ability to contribute to the cause of women's liberation, largely because they saw the movement interests as separate. Instead, women's liberation was a valuable source for coalitional relationships.

At the same time she warned about becoming an “arm of women’s liberation,” for “as gay women we have special kinds of strengths and problems and we should retain our identity” (“Editorial” 4). Overall, her case for “working with” was linked to warnings of the risks of choosing to “work through” women’s liberation: losing visibility, autonomy, and agency. One benefit of maintaining a coalitional relationship with women’s liberation, Benison argued, was that much of the positive visibility and media coverage of “gay women” had occurred within the context of the women’s liberation movement. In fact, Benison added in another article that women’s liberation was the “only place we get anywhere near equal time” and the place from which “we’re reaching those people with whom we relate better anyway, women” (“Why the emphasis?” 6). In part, Benison offered a coalitional relationship with women’s liberation as a primary option for lesbians already affiliated with the gay movement. Working from that coalitional relationship would also allow for lesbian-feminists to enhance their visibility.

Sally Gearheart, a lesbian-feminist activist in San Francisco writing in *Sisters* in 1970, also articulated a coalitional relationship with women’s liberation. She located the political potential for lesbians in their gendered identity and used that identification as the basis for common ground with women’s liberation. She argued, “Lesbianism is implicitly revolutionary,” echoing radical lesbian-feminist arguments. In her piece, “Lesbianism as a Political Statement,” Gearheart sought to politicize, even radicalize, lesbians in *coalition* with women’s liberation (2). In her essay, she named “women’s liberation” and “gay women’s liberation” separately, constituting the latter as a clear space for lesbians seeking a political and identity “home” without falling into the trap of becoming a mere “arm” of the larger movement, echoing Benison’s concerns. For Gearheart, who noted her own identification with women’s liberation and what she termed “gay women’s liberation,” gender identity remained the common thread.

Some lesbian-feminists reframed the relationship with women’s liberation as coalitional precisely because differences around sexuality, race, and ethnicity pulled them toward other coalitional subjectivities grounded in other histories, politics, and relationships. For example, women like Betty Powell or Margaret Sloan drew upon experiences with the National Black Feminist Organization and third-world gay women’s organizations like the Salsa Soul Sisters, both of which specifically responded to challenges in women’s liberation, gay liberation, and black freedom movements (Breines; Combahee River Collective; Springer). For women who affirmed loyalty to gay liberation and homophile histories and communities, their coalitional subjectivity was forged in the fires of homophobic society and the ongoing fight for gay rights and liberation. Many had been active in gay movement organizations like DOB, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), or Gay Activist Alliance as they embraced feminist activism and lesbian pride (Cooper 3). Rita Mae Brown and Karla Jay, for example, both members of the Radicalesbians and authors of the WIW manifesto, were also affiliated with GLF (Jay 76–77). For those lesbian-feminists compelled both out of a coalitional relationship with the gay movement or a hesitancy to become an “arm” of women’s liberation, they tried to envision an entire movement dedicated to liberating gay women, built around varying articulations of lesbian-feminism.

Naming the movement—gay women’s liberation or lesbian liberation or lesbian-feminist liberation—was critical to the authors of many written contributions, including the aforementioned article by Gearheart. For her, “gay women’s

liberation” reflected a coalitional relationship with women’s liberation. For others, like Sharon Crase, lesbian liberation offered a unique constitutive rhetoric for lesbians. To accomplish this shift, Crase argued, lesbians needed to jettison the term “gay,” a term that linked them with men. “I am no longer gay. I am a lesbian,” she declared, “‘gay’ is no longer *our* word” (18, emphasis original). She continued:

The “gay” men have taken the word and applied it to themselves as well as to us. Since we have very little in common with our “gay brothers,” I believe the same word cannot be descriptive of both homosexual men and lesbians. Lesbian is *our* very own word. . . . We have a copyright on it. (18)

Crases argument works in two key ways. First, she challenged those in the gay movement, like Frank Kameny, who argued that “gay” worked to reference men and women. Second, in contrast to the woman-identified woman’s linguistic distancing, Crase, like Adams and Peters discussed above, highlighted the word “lesbian” and claimed it as a politicized identity shared by a group referenced by “our” in a way that centralized sexuality. Indeed, Crase was claiming identity grounded in a politics of relation, a mode of belonging. It was an identity that went beyond identifying with other women, as Crase explained, “As *women-loving women*, proud of who and what we are, we must think of ourselves in strong, proud terms—as Lesbians—with a capital ‘L’” (18, emphasis mine). Her play on words directly pushed back on the limitations of the woman-identified woman. She emphasized not only “who” lesbians were based on whom they loved, but “what” they were, pointing to a sense of identity deeper or beyond mere loving or identification. Her use of capitalization connoted the importance of several terms she rhetorically (re)claimed in her article, including “Lesbian,” “Dyke,” and “Sisters” (18–19). These words resisted not only the woman-identified woman but also the status of “gay” as an umbrella term within the gay movement. These moves reflected how a pivot to highlight sexuality offered modes of resistance and resources for articulating identity. Another author, writing about joining the 1976 Lesbian Pride Committee in New York City, similarly mused about the powerful words associated with lesbian identity. “I hear that word LEZBIAN; something special about that sound . . . like all the pride I feel . . . all the power I feel, all the energy” (“Lezbian Pryde” 10–11). This writer, Crase, and others called attention to lesbians’ presence in the world, in women’s liberation, and in the gay movement.

Pivoting also provided a useful strategy for some lesbian-feminists of color who proffered lesbian identity as an important vehicle for creating an inclusive, albeit challenging, coalitional subjectivity inclusive of women across racial, ethnic, and class boundaries. Writing in the *Lesbian Tide* in 1974, Jenice Jeanette, a black lesbian in the Los Angeles area, declared, “First, I’m black. I’m a woman second, and a lesbian third” (23). Despite its presence as the tertiary term, Jeanette noted how her lesbian identity afforded her a direct response to the sexism in the world and within the black community:

Being a lesbian makes me stronger, it makes me want to fight all the time. I can walk away from a lot of things, like the trips guys lay on my head, because I’m a lesbian. It gives me some kind of strength over the Black female who isn’t a lesbian, who caters to that bullshit trip that goes on in the ghetto. (23)

Jeanette found strength and energy in her identity as a lesbian even though it complicated her relationship to the black community. She added that her identity as a black lesbian also complicated her relationship with white lesbian-feminists. She explained, “a lot of black women don’t feel comfortable with white lesbians. . . . A lot of black women just don’t feel white lesbians are as interested in our welfare as you are in your own” (23). Her shift from third person, speaking about white lesbian-feminists in general to the second person “you” at the end of the statement, directly confronted those white lesbian readers regarding their own privilege. She also shifted from the distanced “a lot of black women” to “our,” positioning herself among those who “don’t feel comfortable with white lesbians.” Jeanette argued that black women were more likely to have come from the “black movement” and that background created a key point of difference, departure, and disconnect. Finally, the perception of white lesbians as “rich white girls” deepened the experiential divide between groups along class lines (23). Though Jeannette’s statement features a theme of frustration with and division from white lesbian-feminists, her response articulates some of what feminist scholar Bernice Reagon would later deem a primary challenge of coalitions. Reagon explains, “You don’t go into coalition because you *like* it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody else who could possibly kill you, is because that’s the only way you can figure you can stay alive” (242). Indeed, even as she expressed frustration with white lesbian-feminists, Jeanette’s solution was to embrace their shared identity and experiences of oppression *as lesbians* in order to “stay alive” together.

Reframing the relationship with women’s liberation as coalitional opened the potential to address interlocking oppressions and modes of difference. Importantly, shifting toward a coalitional relationship and resisting assumed identification associated with WIW provided a ground on which lesbian-feminists could pivot. Supporting shared identification as *lesbians* meant that even in moments when coalitions were not formally established, lesbians like Jeannette were building a sense of the prospects for working together. They tapped into a coalitional relationship that provided a series of possibilities or alternative modes of relations that did not purport to subsume their other identities under one label. On the other hand, identity formations built upon the woman-identified woman were often predicated on micro-hierarchies among *women*, a built-in process of exclusion and inclusion as Tate and Poirot have pointed out.

Throughout the decade, women of color (at times self-identifying with the term “third-world women”) discussed the problems posed by racial privilege, oppression, and the pressures of multiple identities and movement loyalties, while highlighting the concurrent and intersectional quality of their identities.¹⁶ Notably, they engaged in many of these discussions within the pages of lesbian-feminist periodicals that were not directly connected with third-world gay women’s organizations. Addressing one another and diverse audiences that included white lesbian-feminists, women of color frequently sought to retain the power of their difference by avowing each of their identities at once, as equally and simultaneously salient. At the top of an article in the *Lesbian Tide*, Anita Cornwell’s title words cascaded down the page from left to right: “Black . . . Lesbian . . . Woman” (11). Perhaps the order suggested Cornwell’s avowed order of identification or indicated the movement that attracted her foremost loyalty. Yet an alternative interpretation I offer here suggests the visual presentation refuted the notion that her identities were necessarily arranged hierarchically. Rather, she presented them each as concurrent and central in her life.

Within the context of her argument in the article regarding the connection between racism and sexism, Cornwell's primary identities were presented as inherently interconnected, as she did not privilege one over (and at the expense of) another. Likewise, Patty Kunitsugu, who self-identified as an "Asian dyke" in her contribution to the Seattle lesbian-feminist periodical *Out and About*, echoed the sentiments about interlocking rather than merging/submerging identities. She explained, "I do not want to blend in. My difference is something I want to retain, it is my strength" (21). For Kunitsugu, merging identities meant submerging one or more, while retaining the *simultaneity* of her identities was crucial for asserting and affirming her difference. As racism and other forms of difference complicated the relationships among women of color, White lesbian-feminists, the women's liberation movement, and gay liberation, lesbian-feminists of color like Cornwell and Kunitsugu used their multiple locations of difference as critical sources of power, revealing the intersectional possibilities of coalitional subjectivities.

In the face of identity politics that parsed identities, similar arguments affirming intersectional identity possibilities brought together lesbians and lesbian-feminists of varying backgrounds at the 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas. As part of the United Nations-sponsored International Woman's Year, delegates urged the U.S. Congress to consider legislative action by producing a conference report comprising a delegate-approved series of "planks" that articulated the concerns and policy recommendations of women across a wide spectrum of issues (National Commission, "... To Form"). Lesbians and allies fought to include lesbians as part of that official narrative articulating the "status of women" in the United States. In the end, lesbian concerns were included in the brief and controversial "sexual preference" plank (National Commission, "Spirit of Houston"). During the discussion of the plank to gain delegate approval, many speakers pivoted to highlight lesbian identity, which was again marshalled as a "unifier" to bring "a rainbow of women" (in Phyllis Lyon's words) together for a common cause (Martin and Lyon 1). Many arguments in support of the plank captured an emphasis on coalitional relationships across varying modes of difference. Patricia Benevidez, a Chicana lesbian-feminist delegate representing the state of Washington, linked the importance of the plank with others that explicitly addressed other aspects of her life. She told the audience, "Last night I rejoiced when you gave me my rights as a woman. This afternoon you gave me my rights as a Chicana. Please give me my opportunity for full equality and civil rights as a lesbian" (Curry and Rosenfeld). Betty Powell, a black lesbian-feminist, echoed Jeannette's move to highlight her lesbian identity as a way to link lesbian invisibility with the invisibility of other minorities:

The totally false stereotypic image of "man-hating queer" still runs rampant in the land. This lesbian invisibility, like the invisibility of all minorities, negatively perceived by society, has for so long... fostered only ignorance of our persons, our values, our actual lifestyles... which are as rich and diverse as we are in number ("IWY Pictorial").

Other women rose to speak in support of the lesbian rights plank, including Charlotte Bunch, a lesbian-feminist delegate representing the District of Columbia. Bunch argued, "This resolution is not only for lesbians. This resolution is for all women" ("IWY Pictorial"). When the plank was successfully passed, the arena erupted in cheers while lesbians in the balcony released balloons with the words

“We Are Everywhere” (Fleming; Gabriner). Local IWY organizer Claire Noonan wrote of this moment in the lesbian-feminist publication *The Pointblank Times* of Houston:

As we started for the celebration, I realized the one word that was missing from my balloon. The one word that I have used countless times to impress upon homophobic people who have us neatly stacked into one stereotypical mold—WE ARE EVERYWHERE—DIFFERENTLY! As lesbians we do not all have the same needs, desires, or opinions. We do not always agree but we must maintain a continuous dialogue so that we can learn from each other and work together in spite of our differences (2).

These voices demonstrate varying perspectives on how lesbian-feminist identity was constructed in a coalitional relationship with women’s liberation. Subtle (and blatant) attacks plagued lesbians of color and White lesbians as they sought to construct an identity through liberal or radical feminist politics. As some lesbian-feminists began to craft identity outside of, and in coalition with, women’s liberation, they expanded the space for intersectional identities that refused to subsume one identity over another. When it came to crafting a unifying discourse, they frequently resisted the “woman-identified woman” and privileged the term “lesbian” instead. As a result, they expanded the possibilities for lesbian-feminism by creating a set of identity constructions rooted in coalitional relationships that reframed their work *with* as opposed to *through* women’s liberation. They built connections with gay liberation and opened avenues for co-gender activism and consciousness raising in black freedom movements and other activist communities. Such expansion revealed the creative and dynamic ways lesbian-feminists navigated their multiple social movement identifications; addressed oppressions including racism, sexism, and homophobia; and increased their visibility in the process.

Conclusion

This analysis reveals the importance of revisiting feminist histories and even canonical feminist texts to continue building our understanding of this productive and complex period of social change. It demonstrates how the discursive terrain of the lesbian-feminist identity struggle in the 1970s continues to offer a rich site for scholars to contribute to rhetorical, feminist, and queer histories. As Bonnie Dow notes, the women’s liberation movement was “staggeringly complex—rhetorically, organizationally, ideologically” (105), a complexity well suited to rhetorical analysis. This essay takes Dow seriously by revisiting a central feminist rhetorical text of the era from the perspective of lesbian-feminists and informed by a theoretical lens that centralizes coalitional relationships and subjectivities.¹⁷ Doing so reframes and challenges the consistent definition of lesbian-feminism along radical/separatist feminist ideological lines, reconsiders the centrality of women’s liberation and the WIW to the lesbian-feminist identity formation process, and suggests a mode of navigating intersectional identities and multiple movement loyalties through the concept of pivoting.

Many historical narratives of the movement, particularly with regard to lesbian-feminist participants, locate those members primarily within the radical/lesbian-feminist

trajectory (Echols 231; Poirot; Taylor and Whittier 108; Whittier 54). Such narratives and analyses are especially helpful in recognizing, affirming, and examining the presence and contribution of lesbians within radical feminist communities. Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier write, "It is impossible to comprehend contemporary lesbian feminism without locating it in the radical feminist tradition" (108). While I agree with Taylor and Whittier in their interest in historicizing lesbian-feminism, I worry that they may overstate the impossibility of comprehending lesbian-feminism outside of, or in resistance to, the "radical feminist tradition." Certainly, lesbian-feminists had to respond to the constitutive rhetoric emergent from that tradition, but recognizing how they responded and engaged that rhetoric during the 1970s by using an intersectional pivoting strategy expands the possibilities for what lesbian-feminism could mean today relative to that tradition.

Consequently, this study not only confirms the rhetorical and historical significance of the WIW as a central second-wave feminist text but also underscores its importance as women resisted it at the nexus of multiple movements during the 1970s. In so doing, it further complicates the building narrative surrounding the circulation of WIW and the constitutive rhetoric of woman-identification. The WIW had far-reaching impact within the feminist and lesbian-feminist communities, whether activists embraced woman-identification or not. This analysis shows how a prominent circulated text or set of discourses may animate the articulation of a *range* of identities. Indeed, the discursive constitution of woman-identification captured in the WIW created the "conditions for possibility" for lesbian-feminist identities (Jasinski 75). Lesbian-feminists defined, defended, and contested the boundaries of their identities as lesbians and as feminists throughout the 1970s, especially in response to the circulation of the WIW. The numerous lesbian-feminist identity rhetorics that competed for authority within lesbian-feminist communities around the United States reveal the robust and generative process that took place during an important decade. As a result, this essay expands the definition of lesbian-feminism by showing how lesbian-feminists themselves stretched the possibilities for identity and resisted the purportedly encompassing discourse of woman-identification.

To further develop that range of identities, lesbian-feminists tapped into coalitional relationships to negotiate their identities by pivoting. They reconfigured their relationship with women's liberation as a coalitional one in order to speak back to homophobia and racism. Many lesbian-feminists sought to maintain a connection with women's liberation while elevating the visibility of lesbianism and its intersections with other identities in order to challenge inter- and intra-movement oppressions and exclusions. Though at times laced with the language of division, lesbian-feminist rhetors maneuvered, shifted, and pivoted in ways that clearly noted the challenges of coalition (i.e., with gay liberation, white lesbian-feminists, or women's liberation) while raising lesbian-feminist visibility in conjunction with that coalitional relation.

I offer the pivot to suggest how intersectionality can function as a rhetorical strategy by allowing activists to feature one identity (or multiple identities) as a means to connect to multiple groups *without* relinquishing another identity in the process. The pivot affirms the complexity associated with rhetorical efforts to raise visibility, work with others, and develop a sense of collective identity in the face of challenges from many sources. Moreover, as an embodied and performative concept, the pivot attempts to capture the dynamic quality of lesbian-feminist rhetorics that

engaged and resisted the competing pressures of identity and coalition politics. The pivot offers a way to examine how individuals and collectivities contest and/or resist constitutive rhetorics of identity. Consequently, it can help scholars revisit social movement histories in ways that are more nuanced, intersectional, and coalitional. For example, queer, feminist, and queer feminist rhetorical scholars can benefit from considering how lesbian-feminists' dual or multiple identifications with gay liberation and other social movements played a critical role in the process of developing their lesbian and feminist identities. At the very least, because the Radicalesbians hailed from both women's and gay liberation movements, recognizing those dual investments (and others) opens space for the above reinterpretation of the WIW text and the ways it and the rhetoric of woman-identification circulated through lesbian-feminist communities around the United States. By recognizing the overlapping and often interconnected political investments and identifications with gay liberation, black freedom movements, and women's liberation, this essay contributes to the recuperation, revision, and critical analysis of LGBTQ and feminist rhetorical histories.¹⁸

The notion of pivoting further illustrates the theoretical import of a relational and coalitional perspective on social movement rhetoric while still leaving room for identity politics. Centralizing relationships intentionally departs from an organizational approach to coalition politics in order to elevate the affective commitments and challenges that lesbian-feminists and other activists experience while working within formal or informal coalitions. Drawing from the powerful place outside of or in resistance to constitutive rhetoric, this study seeks to appreciate coalitional relationships as another valuable alternative source of identity formation. As a result, the concept of coalitional subjectivity provides a useful theoretical perspective with which to revisit the identity rhetorics of women's liberation, gay liberation, and lesbian-feminism in a way that deepens the sense of complexity activists faced throughout the 1970s. Coalitional subjectivity challenges scholars to reconsider the ways in which identity-formation rhetorics utilize the *tension* between identity and coalition to create multiple, entirely new, and at times highly contingent, opportunities for social movement activism. It acknowledges the ways constitutive identities are continually up for "rhetorical revision" (Charland 136). For example, crafting lesbian-feminist coalitional subjectivities in the context of "gay women's liberation" and "lesbian liberation" capitalized on a growing frustration among lesbians about the failure of both movements (gay rights and women's liberation) to meet their needs and goals ("Letter From" 13–14). Moreover, the above analysis shows how exclusionary practices and coalition politics dramatically impacted the identity construction process taking place within gay liberation and lesbian-feminist communities. It reveals how some lesbian-feminists experienced "shifting set[s] of relations" (Carrillo Rowe 3) and demonstrates their rhetorical agility as they navigated those relations by pivoting to adjust, in slight or grand ways, to meet their (often competing and intersectional) needs. In doing so, it expands the ways in which we come to interpret the contested and generative lesbian-feminist identity rhetorics of that era.

Lesbian-feminists demonstrated significant flexibility in their use of available rhetorical resources to craft coalitional subjectivities. They drew upon and resisted the powerful constitutive rhetoric of the WIW and woman-identification and tapped into their relational investments with other movements (or the relational struggles with the members of those movements) to articulate a multitude of constitutive options. The concept of the pivot theorizes this flexibility in ways that challenge

the deep either/or that persists in critiques of identity politics. Linda Martín Alcoff and Satya Mohanty argue that “[w]e need new thinking” about identity politics (3). Whether examining the plethora of circulating lesbian-feminist discourses, reexamining social movement rhetoric, or revisiting discourses resisting constitutive rhetoric, considering the pivot in conjunction with a coalitional and relational perspective has much to offer future feminist, queer, and social movement scholarship.

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Notes

1. The citations here reference the version of the paper published in *Notes from the Third Year* (81–83). See also the archival version of the pamphlet (Radicalesbians) and a reprint listing Radicalesbians member Rita Mae Brown for the byline in *The Ladder*, a lesbian publication affiliated with DOB (Brown). Throughout this essay I will refer to the “woman-identified woman” in two ways: first, with lowercase letters and dashes when dealing with the concept or a person who identifies as such; secondly, with capital letters and/or an acronym WIW when referring to the published document, “The Woman Identified Woman.”
2. Such archives compel scholars to revisit key moments in feminist history and several are doing just that (See, for example, Poirot, Evans, Gilmore, Roth). My effort to consider a wide range of voices is undoubtedly enabled and encumbered by focusing on lesbian-feminist periodicals and speeches. On the one hand, these periodicals created a space for lesbian-feminists within a wide range of communities to share their ideas about identity and political goals. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that even the lesbian-feminist periodicals feature some voices over others. The editorial boards or collectives that produced such publications performed a critical gatekeeping function. Moreover, some voices were heard at rallies, meetings, and other gatherings of lesbian-feminists but were not written down in the pages of the periodicals. Despite the limitations, considering the range of periodicals brings such voices from the margins to the center of this analysis. It is by analyzing these voices that I aim to expand particularly on Helen Tate’s previous studies (“The Ideological Effects”; *Toward a Rhetorical History*) and continue the work of Kristan Poirot. In part, my use of speech texts found in lesbian-feminist activist archival collections contributes to closing the gaps in representation, though again, silences remain for those voices not recorded and preserved in these archives.
3. Lesbian-feminists were part of a number of social movements during this time. Though these publications emerged from women’s liberation– and gay liberation–affiliated groups, they published contributions from (primarily) women who also identified with labor, anti-war, Black freedom, and socialist movements, among others. The fact that their voices and multi-movement rhetorics circulated in these publications make them valuable for rhetorical scholars aiming to unpack the rich complexity of lesbian-feminist political activism in the 1970s. Though this essay focuses on contextualizing lesbian-feminist activism

at the nexus of these two movements—women’s liberation and gay liberation—there are points throughout that highlight the experiences and challenges articulated by women of color as they participated in those movements and beyond. For example, Betty Powell was actively involved in or a founding member of groups affiliated with Black feminism and the gay movement, including the National Black Feminist Organization, Soul Sisters, The National Gay Task Force, and the Gay Academic Union (Powell). Nonetheless, more work needs to be done to account for the experiences and voices of queers and feminists of color that worked and identified across multiple movements.

4. Queer historian Arlene Stein, for instance, argues that though lesbian-feminists deployed a series of identity reconstructions from the 1970s through the 1990s, they failed to sustain their social movement over time or avoid some of the challenges because activists did not offer a unified central definition of “lesbian-feminist” (136). Though she articulates a common critique of identity politics, Stein’s assessment seems to foreclose the possibility of interpreting the contestation over “lesbian-feminism” as a generative process.
5. Susan Gal proffers recalibration as a way to negotiate dichotomies. I utilize the concept of recalibration to negotiate different binary relationships, including identity politics/coalition politics and women’s liberation/gay liberation movements.
6. Throughout this essay I refer to the feminist movement activism that took place from 1970 through the early 1980s primarily as “women’s liberation” to both recover the underused term and strategically avoid the terminology attached to the “wave” metaphor. In particular, Helen Tate argues that by 1970, the reform and revolutionary branches of the feminist movement had largely joined forces in what she calls the “radicalized mainstream feminist movement” (See *Toward a Rhetorical History* 91). My project seeks to contribute to histories of second-wave feminism without relying too heavily on the wave imagery (See also Evans, “Re-Viewing the Second Wave”; Baxandall and Gordon).
7. In addition to limitations concerning sexuality, there are several others that plague the unifying rhetoric of “sisterhood.” Primary among these, black and third-world feminist scholars have argued that sisterhood discourse masks White privilege (See Mohanty 24).
8. Invisibility qua privatization was not wholly negative. Just as the privatization of lesbian sexuality protected the public face of the movement from lesbian stigmatization, some women found its protection necessary for survival (Morreux 6–7). Privatization rationales persist, particularly in legal decisions concerning queer lives and practices (Campbell).
9. Fear of lesbian “recruitment” within feminist circles developed from the assumption that lesbians were “demanding that every woman be a lesbian” in order to be an *authentic* feminist (Myron and Bunch 11). These wholesale accusations against lesbian-feminists joined charges that lesbians thought of themselves as “superior” because they did not deal with men, attacks that lesbians were chauvinists and “into oppressive sex roles,” or arguments calling them “divisive to the women’s movement” (Myron and Bunch 11).
10. Moreover, the available feminist identity lacked inclusivity as it was primarily White and middle-class. As Katie King notes, the centralizing of lesbianism and lesbian identity within radical feminism was not universally positive, as it made lesbianism a “magical sign” (135).
11. Additionally, the emphasis on shared gender identity among radical lesbian-feminists contributed to a strained relationship with gay men because it did not provide a space for alternative versions of masculinity (Penner 235).
12. Homophile leader Frank Kameny proffered the phrase “Gay is Good” as a turn on the well-known phrase “Black is Beautiful.” It soon became a mantra among homophile activists. In later years, Kameny continued to argue that “gay” was the best term for all homosexuals, while lesbian-feminists like Del Martin, Joan Biren (JEB), and Charlotte Bunch, among others challenged the ways in which “gay” rendered lesbian women invisible (Johnson 214).
13. Capitalization of identity markers in this essay is limited to quotations of primary source materials.
14. In other research I also seek to extend Poirot’s work analyzing the internal containment that occurred within lesbian-feminist communities by attending to the plethora of disciplinary discourses in which lesbian-feminists of all stripes engaged throughout the 1970s.
15. Perhaps the more familiar story of woman-identification is how it worked for lesbian-feminists. True, many lesbian-feminists held on to the promise contained within

the construct of the woman-identified woman. Many adopted the identity of woman-identified woman to successfully navigate internal feminist politics, ameliorate the painful experiences with sisters in women's liberation, and craft lesbian-feminist politics. Following the distribution and circulation of the WIW manifesto, lesbian-feminist activist and Furies Collective member Charlotte Bunch positioned the woman-identified woman at the heart of lesbian-feminist politics (8). For some lesbian-feminists—including Bunch—the woman-identified woman was simply *synonymous* with the “lesbian [who] commits herself to other women for political, emotional, physical, and economic support,” representing “one part of challenging male supremacy” and a prong of the lesbian-feminist agenda (8). Eleanor Cooper, a lesbian-feminist writing in *The Lesbian Feminist* in 1979, looked back on the WIW as a critical “analysis of Lesbian oppression and Lesbian pride,” which made it “the most basic statement of Lesbian feminism” (3). Finally, Phyllis Lyon, a lesbian-feminist activist based in San Francisco pointed out to an audience at the University of Missouri in 1975, “The lesbian, a woman-identified woman, is truly the key to helping other women find their true identity as women. And this is a great deal of what Women's Liberation is all about” (9). For these activists and others, woman-identification was a powerful mode of communicating lesbian and lesbian-feminist identity. By and large, these lesbian-feminists felt that women's liberation was crucial to their identity formation. They sought to extend the feminist critique of patriarchy by connecting it to heterosexual ideology, a perspective largely captured by the WIW.

16. The term “third-world woman” has been discussed and critiqued extensively by feminist scholars (including Chandra Mohanty). I use the term in this essay when referring to or quoting the women who self-identified as such during the 1970s. It is also important to note that developing a coalitional relationship with women's liberation or gay liberation by third-world women was a critical way for third-world gay women to circumvent the racist, classist, and even ageist experiences within those activist communities (“Third World” 10).
17. The process of revisiting feminism's second wave continues apace. Stephanie Gilmore and other scholars in the collection *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, for example, reconsider this history with an eye toward coalitional politics.
18. I hope that reconsidering these histories can offer tools for activists today. LGBT and queer activists and many others continue to navigate the exhilarating and frustrating aspects of identity politics. Using letters to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer suggests each identity is separate and unique, and some people utilize those labels for self-identification and activism. At the same time, there is pressure to give up the work of identity politics, because, echoing Todd Gitlin and others, they are limited, divisive, and detrimental to movement success (35). More than an identity, queer is proffered as a new, improved umbrella term, part reclaimed slur, part theoretical perspective that shatters and undermines dichotomies of sex, gender, and sexuality. This is a powerful term that has animated many activist efforts. And yet, I am hesitant to simply throw the other identities out with the bathwater and replace them with queer. Just like “gay” before it, queer does not *necessarily* shatter all of the boundaries and privileges associated with sexism, racism, classism, and more. Despite the possibilities of umbrella terms, they are as limiting and covering as the imagery suggests. For example, even as “queer” rises within LGBT politics, the limiting hetero/homonormative rhetoric of love and commitment that took over in the effort to secure marriage equality, leaving observers to ask, “What else is there for LGBTQ people to fight for?” Such a narrowed public policy agenda ignores many intersections of oppression, including income inequality, incarceration and the prison-industrial complex, hate crimes, workplace discrimination, homelessness, housing inequalities, and many more. Thus, while queer may offer radical and transgressive possibilities as it challenges the identities associated with the letters LGBT, oppressive structures and practices remain that queer (as an umbrella term) actually protects and insulates. I am concerned about the erasures that take place, particularly the erasures of identity *possibility*. Thus, looking back at the complexities generated by women avowing one of those identity categories, lesbian—more specifically lesbian-feminist—can provide insight into the possible complexities that are missed, ignored, or simply

erased by the move toward queer as a blanket term. This should be a point of concern for those invested in queer politics today. Moreover, this concern for erasure need not rehearse the dichotomy of identity politics versus coalition politics.

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